

History of Drug Court

Drug Courts throughout the nation began in the 1980s in Florida as a way of reducing prison populations while aiding addicts. Drug Court programs are constructed in a variety of different ways in different jurisdictions, but all share one commonality – to reduce criminal recidivism by addressing the drug addiction that lies at the root of many criminals' activities.

Drug Courts in Iowa were first begun in 1993 in Polk County. Whereas the program began as one focused on misdemeanants, it soon was transformed into a prison diversion program where felons could avoid prison or have their sentences reconsidered. Polk County Drug Court has at all times between 55 and 75 active clients who have a myriad of requirements that must be met to be successful.

Drug courts now exist in most judicial districts of the state. Each Drug Court has its own rules, and type of defendant that may be eligible. The Polk County Drug Court has evolved into a prison diversion program where only those defendants who would otherwise be using state resources in prison are able to undergo great changes and become law-abiding, taxpaying citizens.

Polk County Drug Court Program Today

When Drug Court began, it was funded through federal grants which carried many restrictions as to the type of program to be run, and the clientele to be served. After a few years, money to support the program was secured through Department of Corrections money. Recently, that money has been provided through the Healthy Iowans Tobacco Trust Fund. Those funds have now ended, and the program must secure funding through normal state procedures.

Drug Court promotes collaboration between a many different judicial and correction officials. Today the Drug Court Program is staffed by 2 probation officers, a treatment officer, a county attorney, a defense attorney, a 5th District Department of Corrections administrative assistant, a 5th District Department of Corrections Supervising Officer, and a District Court Judge. Clients who are in the program meet with probation officers and the treatment officer during the week, and with the defense attorney as needed. Additionally, they may contact any member of the staff for advice. Clients who have recently entered the program will meet in court every Friday; as clients progress, they meet less frequently in court. The program intends to advise and help clients with the many problems in their lives as just removing drugs from a person's life who has never learned life skills will just lead to temporary successes.

The clients of the Polk County Drug Court vary in age from barely over 18 to over 60 years of age. The program has had great successes with people who have been to prison 5 or more times, and has also had success with those who've never been to prison.

Money and Drug Court

Polk County Drug Court is one of few programs offered in the Department of Corrections that can demonstrate a positive return on investment of public dollars. Costs incurred in the program include both treatment costs, as most clients enter into an inpatient treatment program prior to beginning the program, and aftercare costs after release from treatment. Additional costs are staffing costs. The county attorney works a regular caseload on top of her Drug Court assignment. The judge operates a trial schedule on top of the Drug Court assignment. The defense counsel is paid through the department of corrections, but is paid as an independent contractor with no benefits for a rate less than the normal appointed attorney rate. The treatment officer, Department of Corrections supervisor and administrative assistant all have other duties outside of Drug Court activities. Only two probation officers are full time Drug Court staffers.

The cost of an average 20 month prison stay in Iowa is \$ 31,600.00. The cost per client for an average 20 month stay in Drug Court is \$ 5,780.00. On top of this obvious cost savings, there are many other. Each Drug Court client pays \$300.00 for supervision fees. Clients pay for their own halfway house placements. Clients must repay restitution when owed. Each Drug Court client also must be employed a minimum of 32 hours a week by a company that takes out federal and state taxes. Not only must Drug Court clients be employed so they show up for work, but they are constantly tested for drugs so employers can be sure that their employees will be on the job. Drug Court clients must repay any outstanding court costs prior to getting off probation. The clients must also address child support payments to progress in the program. These efforts are not only saving the state money, but creating a responsible citizenry from the same people who had previously cost the state great deals of money.

Drug Court in Society

Drug Court clientele are taught to realize the large costs to society of their actions. Towards that end, each must complete 75 hours of community service to complete the program. Most clients complete many times that amount of community service. Many local clean up efforts and park renewal programs have been spearheaded by Drug Court clients. The central Iowa Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous programs are filled with past and present Drug Court clients. Because Drug Court lasts a minimum of 16 months, the defendants involved must be active in recovery and society for a period of time long enough to affect a permanent change in their actions and attitudes. Thousands of people in central Iowa have been positively affected by Drug Court clients.

But the positive effect of this program cannot simply be calculated from the high success rate of clients in the program and low recidivism rates of clients. Many clients who have not been successful, and have had to go to prison have spoken as to the

program changing their lives even though they didn't graduate. These people are additional positive ambassadors for the program.

Requirements

Drug Court is a minimum 16 month program which demands its participants keep very busy in ways that will engrain positive changes. Employment is demanded of people with little work history. Clients must timely keep appointments, drop UA's when requested, and make many meetings and court dates. Participants become responsible to the court, their families and to society in general. Clients must repay all court costs, fines, and restitution before being released off probation. Only about 1/3 of the defendants recommended for Drug Court are actually accepted into Drug Court.

Conclusion

We would be glad to talk with the committee or your staff about any questions you may have. In addition, we can certainly provide the Drug Court Process Evaluation Report prepared by the Iowa Consortium in 2008, but we assume the committee already has access to that glowing report. We would also hope that you or a member of your staff might be willing to come to Drug Court graduation, an event that occurs 3 times a year and honors people who have successfully completed all of the requirements of Drug Court.